

Several of the City's Most-Anticipated Development Projects Are Back On Track

At long last, these new developments have received a few new developments of their own.

Several development projects proposed for Boston—but considered dead due to the recession or other reasons—have recently experienced breaths of new life.

A couple of these are office buildings, which should give encouragement to those who fear whether Boston is still a “world-class” city when it comes to business. Banks don’t lend money to developers unless they’re sure they can get their money back, and no developer can break ground on an office building without a list of tenants willing to commit to signing leases. As these projects indicate, we could potentially see several million square feet of new commercial space coming online in the next three to five years.

What’s even more thrilling is that a few of the proposals are such large, “mixed-use” projects they will, in effect, create new, standalone neighborhoods that include housing, restaurants, shops, markets, hotels, and open space once they are completely built.

All in all, these developments are an extraordinary, eye-opening turn of events for our stodgy, 384-year old city. Here’s a look at what’s to come:

Office: 888 Boylston Street, Back Bay



Photo provided

Boston Properties, owner of the Prudential Center complex, announced during an investors' conference call last week that it's planning on breaking ground later this

year on its 888 Boylston office and retail project, according to Thomas Grillo of the *Boston Business Journal*. Boston Properties received Boston Redevelopment Authority approval for the development back in 2008 for the 442,500-square foot, 17-story building, but the economy got in the way. The project will cost an estimated \$275 million.

In January, **Bisnow** reported that Bloomingdale's had been secured as the anchor tenant for the retail section and that **Natixis Global Asset Management** was in negotiations for up to 100,000-square feet of office space. This is enough, apparently, for the owner to secure financing for the project and to move forward.

The building would rise on the last available parcel on the Prudential Plaza, a project that began in 1964 (50-years ago!) with the decking of the Massachusetts Turnpike Extension and construction of the Prudential Tower, and that has since expanded to include two more office towers, a Sheraton hotel, four apartment buildings (including the brand-new **Avalon Exeter**, the Belvedere condominiums, and the Mandarin Oriental condominiums and hotel.

Office: Trans National Place, Downtown



Also reported last week (and also in the *Boston Business Journal*) is that the City of Boston is considering selling the city-owned Winthrop Square Garage in the Financial District and accepting proposals for a new office tower to rise in its place. This is unexpected news.

A previous proposal put forth by former mayor Tom Menino to sell the land to abutter **Steve Belkin** and his Trans National Group and for the tower to replace both the garage and Mr. Belkin's building, but the sheer enormity of the project (1.3-million square feet of space, 80 stories, 1,000-foot tall) and the changing economic climate eventually killed it.

Apparently mayor Marty Walsh is of the same mind. He told the *BBJ* the city plans to sell the garage, and it looks as though TNG could end up its partner.

The project would certainly change the skyline, as it would become the tallest building in the city. The current champ, the John Hancock Tower, is 60-stories tall and rises approximately 790 feet.

But even though the mayor is on board, this isn't necessarily a done deal. The Federal Aviation Authority controls how high buildings can rise anywhere near a major airport, and a Logan Airport flight path goes right over the Financial District. This means the 1,000-foot building could end up being 700 feet or shorter.

And some in the architecture community are concerned about the demolition of the Trans National Group building, considering it "historically significant," as it was designed by **Paul Rudolph**, of Brutalist fame. (Brutalist, meaning in the style of the **Government Service Center** near North Station—also a Rudolph creation—and Boston's City Hall.)

My bet is this will move forward rather rapidly and that Boston will see a new tower by the end of this decade.

Mixed Use: Tremont Crossing, Roxbury



For years, development has been promised for Parcel 3, a major plot of land located on Tremont Street in Roxbury near the Boston Police Department's headquarters and Northeastern University.

Elma Lewis Partners has held onto the development rights for several years without anything happening. Finally, due to an improving economy and due to Northeastern's expansion, which brought a new vitality to the area along with the interest of national investors), it looks as though the parcel may become something more than a fenced-off field of weeds.

The development team (which includes **Feldco Development**) behind **Tremont Crossing** signed a letter of intent with **BJ's Wholesale Group** to lease up to 90,000 square feet in the 400,000-square foot retail section of the project. This will make it easier for them to get financing for the other parts of the project. Tremont Crossing will eventually encompass 1-million square feet of space and include retail and restaurants, office space, a 200-room hotel, parking garage, and a 19-story residential tower. Also proposed is a new home for the museum of the **National Center for African-American Artists**.

Having such a major retail presence in this neighborhood seems a bit odd, to be honest. At first glance, it's out of place with what else is going on down there. The **Whittier Street** housing project and the **Northeastern** dorms generate a small amount of foot traffic, but basically, anyone going to BJ's or another store in the new "mall" will be driving. It could turn the neighborhood into another **South Bay**, which isn't necessarily a good thing. Not when everyone in Boston is clamoring for more housing right now.

Still, I'm enthusiastic about this project and hope it all comes together. It will create activity where right now there is none.

Housing: Mass Pike Parcels 12 and 15, Back Bay





The **Massachusetts Department of Transportation** controls air rights to several parcels of “land” above the MassPike located near the intersection of Boylston Street and Massachusetts Avenue, at the edge of the Back Bay.

After years of false starts, MassDOT recently awarded development rights to Parcels 12 and 15 to companies controlled by **Adam Weiner** and **Steve Samuels**, which will build a \$360 million project that will include residences, retail, restaurants, and a new hotel. Yet to come is the awarding of the rights to build on Parcel 13.

It will be interesting to see these mid-rise and high-rise towers go up in that area. **Berklee College of Music** recently finished its own project, a 16-story dormitory and learning space tower around the corner, and has proposed building the 24-story “Crossroads” dormitory/performance space building at the corner of Mass Ave and Boylston Street, which would mean at least five residential buildings of significant size where right now there are none.

Housing: Christian Science Plaza, Back Bay



Photo provided

The Church of Christ, Scientist received BRA approval in 2013 to build two towers on land it owns in the Back Bay off of Huntington Avenue, a project it first proposed back in 2010. One will be residential while the other will be a hotel, which will join the Hilton and Sheraton hotels across the street. (As well as the **infamous** Midtown Hotel down the way.)

They appear to be moving forward, having recently announced that financing has been secured and a ground-breaking promised “before the end of the year.”

The new construction will go up on what is now a parking lot and ramps to/from the CSC’s underground parking garage, as well as a tiny plot of grass that is used by dog owners as a public toilet. The new buildings will be an improvement to the aesthetics of the neighborhood.

Housing: NorthPoint, East Cambridge / Boston



Photo provided

The **NorthPoint** mixed-use project is massive, covering 45 acres of land at the intersection of Cambridge and Boston. There's been a rather tortured history to this project, due to its size and complexity. Land-ownership changes have complicated things while its location muddled the water (literally) and led to a drawn-out **lawsuit** since it backs up against tidelands and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has strict guidelines on what can be built nearby.

All this drama led to completion of the first two condominium buildings in the \$2.3 billion project in 2007...and then, nothing else.

Things are changing. HYM Investment's Twenty|20 is under construction and **Wood Partners** is building a 15-story apartment building.

This is good news for everyone (including the investors). Eventually there could be as many as 2,800 units of housing and 2.2 million square feet of office space on the site, along with office buildings and retail, and the **MBTA** has promised to build a renovated Lechmere Green Line stop.

Mixed Use: Boston Landing, Brighton





Boston Landing is a large, mixed-use project out in Brighton, which will eventually bring to the neighborhood a hotel, office and retail space, and a new world headquarters for New Balance.

Phase I of the project is already under construction, which puts it in a different category than the developments listed above, but in a significant move last week, New Balance took on Thomas O'Brien and his **HYM Investment Group** as a co-developer of the space, last week.

HYM is a big player in Boston development these days, involved in the **Congress Street Garage** project and at NorthPoint. While HYM does projects of all types, news of the partnership is interesting because HYM does a lot of residential while the Boston Landing project is conspicuous for its lack of a housing component.

You see where I'm going with this. My hope is that New Balance ends up proposing and building apartments and condominiums on their site. Brighton could use some higher-end development in the area, and given that this project will eventually

include a brand-new commuter rail stop on the Worcester Line, this would literally be transit-oriented housing offering badly-needed housing to the neighborhood.